

# Factors Influencing Child Fostering Practices in Bayelsa State, Nigeria: Dangling between Necessity and Reciprocity

DOI: 10.36108/NJSA/5102/13(0240)

Ezebunwa E. Nwokocha\*

Turnwait O. Michael

Department of Sociology

University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author: miczeze@yahoo.com

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined child fostering practices in Bayelsa State as a way of understanding the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors on critical family decisions. Functionalism, Social Action and Rational Choice perspectives provided the theoretical anchor upon which the thematic phenomenon was discussed. Quantitative data were collected from 408 questionnaire respondents. Six In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted among biological and foster parents. The mean age of the respondents was 32.5±10.8 years. More than half of the respondents had negative perception about child fosterage; poverty, desire to have children enrolled in school, effective training of fostered children, death of parents, and marital separation are implicated in the decision by families to have their children fostered. Despite the influence of modernism, the practice has remained virile in Bayelsa state due to persistent high fertility, poverty and its traditional and symbolic significance among other reasons.*

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural factors, foster children, high fertility, traditional symbolism

## **Introduction**

Nearly half of Nigeria's population is under the age of 15 (NPC and ICF International, 2014), which is an indication of a virile fertility environment on one hand, and a call to prioritize attention on issues that affect young people as future leaders, on the other (Isiugo-Abanihe *et al.*, 2015). For several reasons including ignorance, polygyny, high population and misplaced priorities, a large number of children in Nigeria are vulnerable to different risks attributed to poverty and insensitivity to critical human development issues (Adeoti and Popoola, 2012). Research narratives on the matter have tended to focus more on claims by families about the persuasiveness of their inherent limitations to adequately cater for young family members (Bledsoe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989). Consequently, child fostering which has been described as widespread in sub-Saharan Africa (Akresh, 2005), has become a handy alibi as well as panacea for overcoming real or imagined inability to discharge parental obligations to children.

Isiugo-abanihe (1985: 53) in his seminal article described fostering as “the relocation or transfer of children from biological or natal homes to other homes where they are raised and cared for by foster parents”. As Brydon (1979), Etienne (1979), and Goody (1982) observed, most parents that take the option of fostering do so to deal with uncertainties and risks that may accompany failure to meet the basic needs of their children, particularly education and nutrition. Goody (1982), Chernichovsky (1985), Gould (1985) and Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) further added that in some societies, parents that practice fostering in order to transfer the responsibility of child rearing to other households. In addition, Ardayfio-Schandorf and Amissah (1995), Goody (1982), Issa and Awoyemi (2006) noted that high fertility and low socioeconomic status are the key drivers of fosterage.

Notwithstanding the reasons canvassed for practicing fosterage, Akresh (2004) observed that most children that live away from direct parental care are more likely to work laboriously, experience psychological problems and disruption in family orientation. Indeed, children that encounter multiple fostering experiences in households that are significantly culturally diverse, suffer from crisis of value identity and development distortions related to mental and psychosocial wellbeing.

As studies show, although child fosterage results from negotiations between senders and receivers, disproportionately more attention has been paid to the sending families or biological parents than their receiving counterparts or non-biological parents (Aspass, 1999; Vandermeersh, 2002; Serra, 2002). Against this background, the study examined the perception of people about child fostering practices, and the socio-cultural factors driving the practice in Bayelsa State, classified among areas with high prevalence of child fosterage in Nigeria. This paper is apt in view of the paucity of information on child fosterage, which although practiced in virtually all African societies has received negligible academic attention. The study by Isiugo-Abanihe in 1985 catalyzed scholarly discussions around the subject, but soon receded probably due to the popularity it enjoys in the continent particularly in sub-Saharan Africa reputed for high fertility (Nwokocha, 2015).

The significance of this study lies in the fact that although several studies on child fosterage have been conducted by several researchers (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Oni, 1995; Vandermeerch, 2003; Akresh, 2005; Issa and Awoyemi, 2006, among others), none of these was undertaken in the South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria where Bayelsa state is situated. Thus, a huge knowledge gap exists not only because the area contributes disproportionately to Nigeria’s characteristic high fertility regime (NPC and ICF International, 2014), which is one of the drivers of the practice, but also because of the agglomeration of diverse cultures within the zone (Otite, 2000). Hence, a study such as this will highlight different patterns and dynamics of fosterage that may be lacking in a unitary cultural milieu that does not conjure such diversity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on Functionalist, Social Action and Rational Choice theories. The functionalist perspective views society as a whole, made up of different sub-systems that work harmoniously for the maintenance of the system (Olayinka and Olutayo, 2013; Ritzer, 2008). The level of interdependence of the units on one another is to the extent that malfunctioning of any of the parts not only affects it, but also other units and invariably leads to disequilibrium that may distort the functionality of the entire system. An appraisal of child fosterage in Nigeria evokes mixed reactions and depends largely on the expectations that actors construct around the phenomenon. For instance, biological parents may argue that sending out their children for fostering could be an approach geared towards maintaining a moderate family size, improve family income in situations where foster parents make remittances to sending families and for foster parents to have the children enrolled in schools among others.

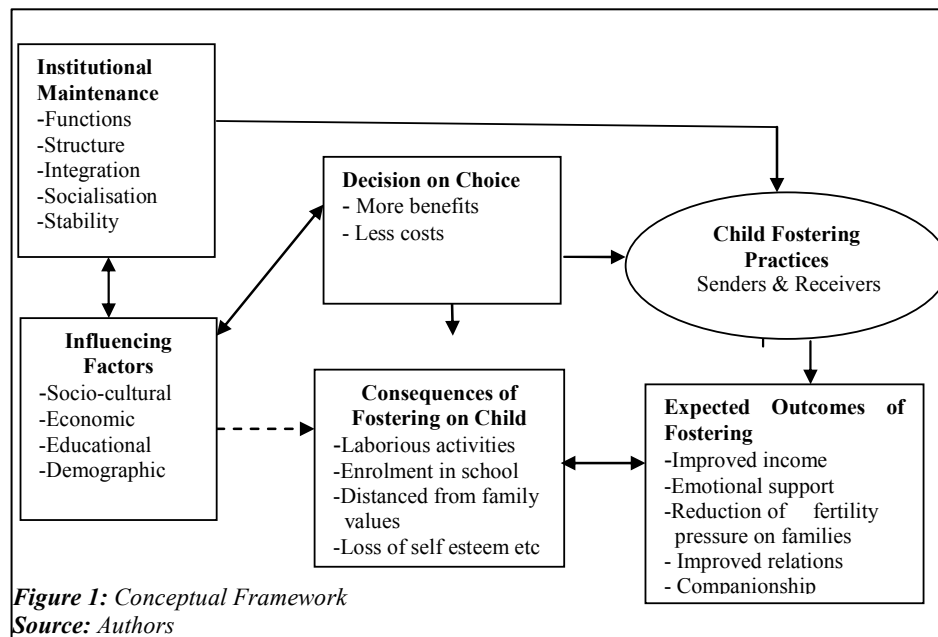
However, considering that, ideally, young family members are meant to imbibe family values from parents and significant others, fostering may be considered dysfunctional irrespective of the justification that parents may adduce for their involvement. For some individuals, parents who present their children for fosterage are inherently persuaded to do so by prevailing dysfunctionality of the socioeconomic environment, which finds expression in poverty and limited opportunities for advancement. Yet, another strand of argument tended to dissociate fostering from economic analysis, and expressed in terms of its relevance in strengthening family ties and maintaining age-long friendship.

The Social Action theory shares important similarities with functionalism in explaining child fostering practices in relevant situations. Max Weber describes action as social when the actor attaches a subjective meaning to his/her action by taking into account the behaviour of others to whom his/her action is oriented (Ritzer, 2008). Hence, the motive behind sending or receiving children for fostering is better explained by parents themselves irrespective of the notion that outsiders (individuals who are not directly involved in the situation) may construct about the situation. The perspective also supposes that beyond understanding the implications that an intended action may have on the actor, the latter should in turn empathize with the situation of the other individual towards whom the action is directed.

Therefore, in contemplating child fosterage, the likely effect on the receiving family should be factored into the negotiation process, by the sending family and vice versa, in order to ensure that each party reaps the benefits that are derivable from the practice. In reality, even when biological parents get involved in fostering as senders with clear good intentions directed at maintaining ties, ensuring better educational opportunities and others, some receiving parents may not reciprocate appropriately. Instead, some of these unsuspecting children are exposed to risks and vulnerabilities that contradict the principle of reciprocity. The action perspective also recognizes that

involvement in fosterage may be an exemplification of a long established habitual customary practice. Linking fostering to primordial consideration may also signal continual defiance to change or discontinuity notwithstanding the incursion of modernity into traditional ethos and sentiments.

Rational choice theory is hinged on the assumption that individuals do not act on the basis of accident or haphazardness but carefully weigh the benefits and costs of an intended action considering available resources (Charles, 2010; Ritzer, 2008; Friedman and Hechter, 1988). The theory posits that an actor who has the privilege of choice between alternative actions, in a given context, chooses an action considered more beneficial than the forgone activity, which is likely more costly. Indeed, the application of this perspective in everyday life makes meaning only if it is established that the actor understands fully the issues and intricacies surrounding each option. The notion of rationality obligates a parent who contemplates presenting his/her child for fostering to do so after carefully assessing options available to achieve a set goal, be it finance, emotion or cementing friendship ties or any other ambition. In what follows, we present a synthesis of the three perspectives.



The conceptual framework indicates that institutional factors and perceived benefits of fosterage impinge directly on fostering practices among senders and receivers. Ordinarily, the motivation for sending or receiving a child should be in the expected positive outcomes that embed in such gesture. Figure 1 however reveals that such an end is not always the case given that some foster children experience negative consequences ranging from mild to severe.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design, and employed quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Specifically, questionnaire, In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were triangulated in eliciting information relevant for analysis. The research was carried out in Bayelsa State, which is located in the South-south geographical zone of Nigeria. Yenagoa, which is the capital of the state, was purposively selected considering that most travellers and non-indigenes reside in the area, given the variety of businesses, employment opportunities and relatively better road infrastructure and other facilities. The cosmopolitan nature of Yenagoa compared to most other areas in the state and beyond is a major factor accounting for the influx of migrants from different parts of Nigeria into the location. Consequently, the capital is relatively densely populated, with residents comprising people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

The study population consisted of biological parents of fostered children, foster parents, and community members. Given that the total population of Yenagoa LGA, according to the 2006 population census, is 353,344, Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula was adopted to arrive at the sample size of 400. However, in order to make for possible errors or omissions in the course of questionnaire administration, 10 percent of that number was added. Thus, a total 440 questionnaires were administered on the study respondents. In the end, 408 questionnaire, which represents 93 percent return-rate, were retrieved and found valid for analyses. Six IDIs and two FGDs were conducted among foster parents and biological parents.

In order to elicit information on community perception about child fostering, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted beginning with the random selection of five political wards in the LGA. The next stage involved selection of two communities from each of the chosen wards through a simple random sampling technique. The existing house numbering at community level was adopted as sampling frame for the selection of households. For communities where house numbering was non-existent prior to the study, ad hoc numbers were assigned for the purpose. Forty-four (44) houses were randomly selected from each community using a table of random numbers. In each selected household, the head of household or in his/her absence an adult aged 18 and above was administered with a questionnaire. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS at univariate and bivariate levels.

Respondents and participants for in-depth interviews and group discussions respectively were selected purposively. They were mainly foster and biological parents of fostered children. Data collected through qualitative sources were translated and transcribed as well as content analysed.

## **Results**

The findings of the study are presented to reflect the specific objectives of the study, which relate to community perception of fostering, the factors that motivate senders and recipients of children for fostering.

### ***Perceptions about Child Fostering Practices***

Table 1 shows the association between respondents' background characteristics and perceptions about child fostering practices. Perceptions about child fostering practices significantly varied by age group (P-Value=0.000), level of education (P-Value=0.000), marital status (P-Value=0.000), currently sent a child for fostering (P-Value=0.002), occupation (P-Value=0.000) and monthly income (P-Value=0.006) at 0.05 significant levels. For ease of interpretation, the column on negative perception about fostering is used as the reference. For instance, the result shows that negative perceptions about child fostering practices increased as respondents' age advanced. The proportion of negative perceptions about child fostering practices was highest among respondents age group 40 and above (79.6%) and lowest among those of age 18-29 (57.5%). Negative perceptions about child fostering decreased as the level of education increased.

Furthermore, negative perceptions about child fostering was higher among ever married respondents (82.5%) than the single (50.8%), and lower among respondents who had recently sent a child for fostering (62.8%) than those (77.1%) who had not. On the basis of occupation, negative perception about child fostering was highest among those in business and trading and lowest among those in other occupations, followed by those in civil and public services. Table 1 also shows that 83 percent of respondents whose average monthly income ranged between N40,001 and N62,001 reported the highest percentage of negative perception about fosterage compared to 43 percent among those who earned over N62,002 monthly. The table indicates that respondents' sex, ethnicity, whether currently received a child for fostering, state of origin, and religion did not show any significant association with perceptions about child fostering practices in the study.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Background Characteristics and Perceptions about Child Fostering Practices**

| Background Characteristics                      | Perceptions about Fostering |             |      | $\chi^2$ | Df | p-value |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|------|----------|----|---------|
|   | Negative                    | Indifferent | Good |          |    |         |
| <b>Age group (years)</b>                        |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| 18-29   | 57.5                        | 23.2        | 19.3 | 20.747   | 4  | 0.000*  |
| 30-39   | 77.2                        | 11.9        | 10.9 |          |    |         |
| 40 and above                                    | 79.6                        | 8.6         | 11.8 |          |    |         |
| <b>Sex</b>                                      |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Male  | 69.2                        | 17.0        | 13.7 | 0.777    | 2  | 0.678   |
| Female  | 66.2                        | 16.9        | 16.9 |          |    |         |
| <b>Level of education</b>                       |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Below secondary                                 | 93.8                        | 2.1         | 4.1  | 68.241   | 4  | 0.000*  |
| Secondary                                       | 71.5                        | 12.7        | 25.8 |          |    |         |
| Tertiary  | 44.6                        | 32.4        | 23.0 |          |    |         |
| <b>Marital status</b>                           |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Single  | 50.8                        | 26.5        | 22.8 | 46.211   | 2  | 0.000*  |
| Ever married                                    | 82.5                        | 8.5         | 9.0  |          |    |         |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                                |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Ijaw  | 64.9                        | 17.3        | 17.8 | 2.372    | 2  | 0.306   |
| Others  | 71.0                        | 16.5        | 12.5 |          |    |         |
| <b>Currently received a child for fostering</b> |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Yes   | 64.3                        | 20.2        | 15.5 | 1.685    | 2  | 0.431   |
| No  | 70.1                        | 15.2        | 14.8 |          |    |         |
| <b>Currently sent a child for fostering</b>     |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Yes   | 62.8                        | 17.7        | 19.5 | 11.986   | 2  | 0.002*  |
| No  | 77.1                        | 16.0        | 6.9  |          |    |         |
| <b>Occupation</b>                               |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Civil/public service                            | 68.0                        | 18.3        | 13.6 | 22.317   | 4  | 0.000*  |
| Business/trading                                | 81.7                        | 7.8         | 10.4 |          |    |         |
| Others  | 53.4                        | 23.3        | 23.3 |          |    |         |
| <b>State of Origin</b>                          |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Bayelsa   | 63.6                        | 18.2        | 18.2 | 4.240    | 2  | 0.120   |
| Others  | 72.7                        | 15.3        | 11.9 |          |    |         |
| <b>Monthly Income</b>                           |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Less than N18,000                               | 66.9                        | 16.5        | 16.5 | 17.912   | 6  | 0.006*  |
| N18,000-N40,000                                 | 67.5                        | 17.5        | 15.1 |          |    |         |
| N40,001-N62,001                                 | 83.1                        | 10.8        | 6.2  |          |    |         |
| N62,002 and above                               | 43.2                        | 27.0        | 29.7 |          |    |         |
| <b>Religion</b>                                 |                             |             |      |          |    |         |
| Christianity                                    | 68.0                        | 16.6        | 15.3 | 1.634    | 2  | 0.442   |
| Islam   | 50.0                        | 30.0        | 20.0 |          |    |         |

*Mean Age = 32.5; Standard Deviation = 10.8; Significance level \* < 0.05*

The mixed reaction expressed by questionnaire respondents is an indication of varying experiences, conceptions, motivations, orientations and other individuals and community factors that shape attitude and behaviour. The views of interview respondents on child fostering were equally diverse, one of them stated:

The practice of sending a child to someone else to care for is not really bad if only the foster parent would take good care of the child as his/her own child. This child living with me, as you can see, is not looking bad because I care for her as if she is my biological child. She is my sister's daughter whose mother died while giving birth to another child. She is 13 years old and had lived with me since age 6. (IDI/Male/52years/Foster Parent/Amarata/2015)

Although the above respondent had a positive attitude toward child fosterage, his position is contingent on the type of treatment and care that a child will receive from foster parents. However, another respondent who is also a foster-parent painted a negative picture of child fosterage as a result of what she witnessed in her neighbourhood. She stated:

This thing you call child fostering is not good and should not be supported at all. The fact that I have a foster child will not debar me from stating that these kids go through horrible experiences. A foster parent, for instance, will know that a 20 litre container is too big for a 9-year foster child but will make sure that the child fetches water with it from a distant source. I am telling you what obtains in this neighbourhood and probably in other locations. (IDI/Female/38years/Foster parent/Okaka/2015)

On the contrary, a male respondent who had experienced marital separation perceived child fostering as a good approach for effective upbringing of his children after separation from his wife. The interviewee also aligned his inability to personally care for his children to the nature of his job. As the respondent explained:

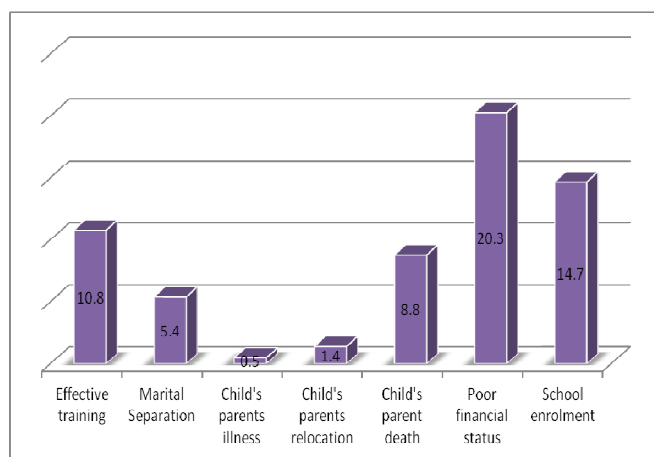
Fostering is not as bad as some people think. Without such practice, I wouldn't have been able to cater for my two children whose mother left me to marry another man. You see, as a man I have to wake up every morning to go to work and sometimes even travel to undertake jobs outside my city. I had to take them to my sister to enable me work and make money to solve family problems. The practice is actually not bad. (IDI/Male/48years/Biological parent/Opolo/2015)

Thus, circumstances around individuals direct their views about child fosterage and the extent to which they are willing to embrace the practice in relevant societies.



**Factors Influencing Presentation of Children for Fostering**

Figure 2 presents the distribution of parents by the major reasons for presenting their biological children for fostering. Poor financial status (20%) was the most reported reason for giving out their children for fosterage; the next factor identified by respondents is that through the practice, children could be enrolled in schools (14.7%) in their foster homes, which may largely be a function of poverty in the biological families of foster children. The least adduced reasons are illness and relocation of biological parents, which together were reported by 1.9 percent of the respondents.



**Fig. 2:** Major reasons for sending out children for fostering

Chi-square analysis in Table 2 shows that there is a significant association between a child's sex and age at the period of presentation for fostering (p-value = 0.006). This indicates that the sex of children significantly influenced the age at which they are sent forth for fostering. This pattern may however vary with another cohort of respondents, to suggest that changing circumstances around families are central in defining the dynamics that play out in fostering practices in communities.

**Table 2:** Association between sex and age of fostered children at the time of presentation for fostering

| Gender | Age at Period of fostering |               |                |                | X <sup>2</sup> | Df | p-value |
|--------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----|---------|
|        | Less than 5 years          | 5 to 10 years | 11 to 15 years | 16 to 17 years |                |    |         |
| Boys   | 9.5                        | 44.2          | 30.5           | 15.8           | 17.897         | 3  | 0.006   |
| Girls  | 13.0                       | 34.2          | 43.5           | 9.3            |                |    |         |

Qualitative data for the study did not emphasize the interaction between sex and age of children at the time of agreement and presentation for fostering. An IDI respondent identified high fertility, poverty and family relations as factors that shaped his decision to send his child for fostering. In his words:

I gave out that child not because I really wanted to... I have seven children; if you add my wife and I, we are nine. Yet, my parents, in-laws and family members make requests for assistance. I am just a carpenter and my wife sells vegetable leaves and coconuts; we don't have enough to care for everybody... so when my relation volunteered to accept the child for upbringing, I did not hesitate to accept the offer to enable me pay the school fees of the remaining ones and feed them. (IDI/57years/Male/Biological parent/Azikoro village/2015)

Focus group participants also discussed the factors that influenced their decision to send their children out for fostering. As a female discussant narrated, she gave her child out to a sister who did not have a child at the time of data collection for this study, as a kind of emotional and psychological support for her. She stated:

I sent out my child for fostering purposes to be with my younger sister who has not had any issue (child) since her marriage for some years now. The idea is for the child to be a kind of companion to her particularly when the husband is not around. You can imagine how she would feel, staying at home alone; the gesture has helped her psychologically, while we keep praying for her to bear her own children. (FGD/43years/Female/Biological parent/Okaka/2015)

An in-depth interviewee who was a widow identified effective upbringing that relate with father-figure as the main reason for giving out her son for fosterage. She revealed:

For me in particular, I sent out my own child because I wanted him to learn from others after the death of his father. You know, when a child is too familiar with the mother, it often leads to carelessness and waywardness. To avoid this, I sent him to my brother's home for them to put an eye on him. (IDI/29years/Female/Biological parent/Okaka/2015)

For an FGD participant whose opinion was similar to others in the group, even when biological parents are aware that their children are maltreated in foster homes, poverty may dissuade them from bringing the children back home. The participant stated:

...the truth is, I don't really have money to care for her (the child) that was why I gave her out in the first place. If you give me job now or money, before tomorrow, my child will be back home.

After all, the person I sent her to live with has been maltreating the little child. (FGD/51years/Male/Biological parent/Okaka/2015)

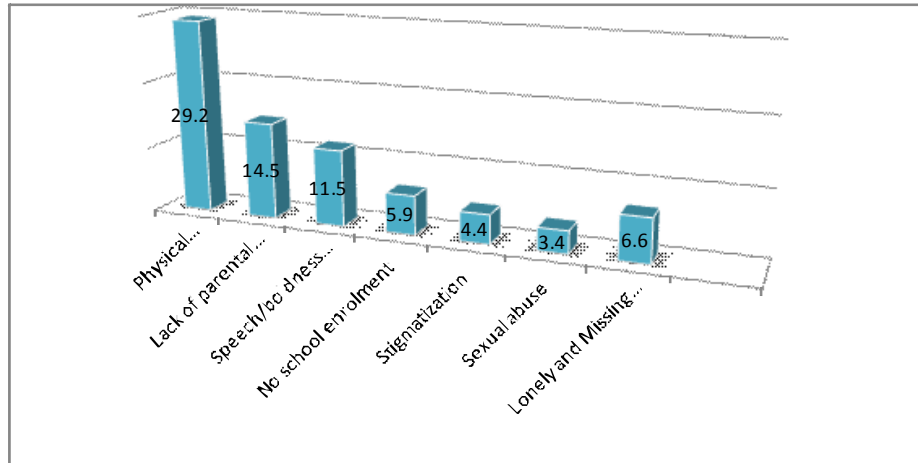
A male participant with many children identified familial ties and child abandonment as factors that influenced his decision to give out his children for fostering. The FGD participant described his situation thus:

I have given out four children for fostering because I have several wives who gave birth to many children, amounting to 15. I know that God gives children and also provides the means for them to be catered for. I gave out three of my children to different relatives whose parents also gave to me to foster when they were young. One of the children that I gave out was abandoned, at a tender age, somewhere on the street close to my house. I sent him for fostering by one of the person I also cared for when he was young. (FGD/68years/Male/Biological Parent/Okaka/2015)

The scenario narrated by the participant explains the efficacy of intergenerational reciprocity in child fostering practices, which is bolstered mainly by the high fertility regime pervading the community.

***Factors influencing decision to receive children for fostering***

Several reasons were adduced by respondents as motivators for receiving children for fostering. Figure 3 shows that 66 percent of the respondents stated that the primary reason why foster parents get involved in child fosterage is to assist biological parents bring up their children, especially in the context of poverty. About 11 percent of the respondents stated that the main reason is to enable the child to live with a relative.



**Figure 3:** Major Reasons for Receiving Foster Children

An FGD participant identified familial ties with the foster child and financial buoyancy as reasons behind accepting a child for fostering. As he stated:

The reason I received the boy currently living with me is that he is my blood relative. You know, having made it in life, one must endeavour to assist his less privileged relatives in order not to be labelled wicked. For that reason I decided to take the boy from his parents and by implication the responsibility of paying his school fees, feeding and clothing. (FGD/42years/Male/Foster parent/Opolo/2015)

Another participant identified the need for a domestic servant as the factor influencing his fostering practice:

My reason for fostering that child is just very simple. I needed a child in my home to help me in some domestic chores. As you can see, I am old and needed someone to assist me at home... So I asked my daughter to send one of her children to come and assist me; that is the girl you are seeing in my house. (FGD/Male /70year/Foster parent/Opolo/2015)

Conversely, another participant identified infertility and religious belief as factors that influenced her decision to accept children for fostering. He narrated:

As you can see I am no more getting younger. I have been married for 11 years now without a single child of my own. Is that not a pity, my friends (referring to fellow FGD participants). There is nothing I have not done. A prophet told me that if I cater for another person's child in my home, I will have mine own biological child. I have done that in the last three years and

have even brought in a second child. We are still hoping for a miracle. (FGD/39years/Female/Foster parent/Opolo/2015)

A female participant who is a pastor's wife identified effective upbringing as a factor that influenced receiving of a child for fostering:

The foster child is our church member by virtue of the fact that the father worships with us. As his spiritual father, my husband decided to request to have the child fostered considering that the step-mother was maltreating him following the death of the child's mother. This we did not only to rescue the child from the risk of physical and psychological harm but also to give him adequate upbringing. (FGD/43years/Female/Foster parent/Opolo/2015)

Another FGD participant noted that child abandonment and the quest to strengthen family ties necessitated her accepting of children for fostering. She stated that:

The children were living in the village where the mother abandoned them. Their father had travelled for years without coming home and the children were left with their grandmother who could not take adequate care of them due to old age. My father being a relative to the family approached me when I returned from Yenagoa and pleaded with me to take the two children, which I did. Their biological father, after some years, came and picked-up the male child. The female child still living with me is 14 years old and currently in secondary school. (IDI/51year/Female/Foster parent/Okaka/2015)

These responses confirm the fluidity of the dynamics that characterizes child fostering practices in the study area.

### **Discussion**

The study has shown that socioeconomic and demographic factors such as age, level of education, marital status, occupation and monthly income affect people's perception about the desirability of child fostering in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state. This confirms the position in the literature that multi factors influence the disposition of individuals to child fosterage (Page, 1989; Pilon, 2003; Akresh, 2005; Smith, 2008; Abeberese and Kyei, 2011). To be sure, reaching a consensus, among respondents and participants, on whether the practice should be sustained was unrealistic in view of the varying circumstances and motives behind individual stakeholder's involvement in the exercise.

It is however noteworthy to state that the true picture of reality about the phenomenon would have been clearer where people maintain a moderate family size. Therefore, discussions around sustainability of the practice are

largely supra-individual insofar as high fertility persists in the area. Our argument is that fostering will naturally dwindle into insignificance in Yenagoa when parents bear fewer children than what obtains presently. The spiral effect of small family size on poverty reduction and its concomitant benefits such as less dependence on relatives and capacity of parents to defray the cost of children's education, which was cited as a major factor of fosterage cannot be overstated. As Ardayfio-Schandorf and Amisah (1995) had also stated, low socioeconomic status among parents drive child fostering practice.

Although situations such as death of parent(s), infertility among couples and the need to boost their morale, companionship for aged grandparents and spousal separation among other reasons may appear compelling for supporting fostering, the likely experiences of a child in the foster home should be critically considered before such decision is taken. This is given that several children in such relationship go through horrifying conditions, notwithstanding that foster-parents may be blood relatives. Similar observation was made by Akresh (2004) who stated that foster-children are usually involved in laborious activities that disrupt their development. We note that unless a child's mental, physical and social wellbeing will be guaranteed by prospective foster parents, getting involved in fostering becomes a very dangerous venture not only for the child but also the community.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study have revealed that child fosterage is a common practice in Yenagoa LGA and Bayelsa state. Although culturally acceptable and embraced by different categories of individuals in society, the factors that propel parents either as senders or receivers of foster children are diverse, and at times personal. For the most part, proponents of the practice emphasize its manifest and covert economic, familial and emotional imperatives and benefits. Their position is seemingly strengthened by quick reference to overarching poverty as justification for inability of parents to cater for their biological children.

The thesis that locates fosterage within the context of necessity for overcoming the pressure inherent in maintaining a large family size incidentally plays down the proximate factors that give impetus to high fertility in the first place. Indeed, pronatalism and persistent child bearing norms pervading the Bayelsa community have greater implications for sustaining child fosterage than other factors such as school enrolment, reciprocity, emotional support and family ties. As a corollary, this paper posits that moderate sized families are more likely able to cater for their children and, in turn, may find it extremely difficult to present these young family members for fostering irrespective of other issues highlighted by research subjects. Hence, other reasons revolve around high fertility and may have little or no influence on fosterage when the latter demographic variable is isolated from the analysis.

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